

Random Encounters

Spider, Spider, Burning Bright ...

By Ramon Arjona



The Courtyard of Spiders

Based on some of the integration thoughts in earlier random encounters for this series, we introduce a fleshed-out encounter to use while the PCs journey through the Underdark or as a part of a larger adventure that the PCs have undertaken.

Preparation

For this encounter, you'll need access to the *Monster Manual*, *Monster Manual II*, *Player's Handbook*, and *Dungeon Master's Guide*.



Encounter Background

If you wish to structure this encounter to utilize all three elements presented in the

"Spider, Spider, Burning Bright . . ." random encounter series, here are two options to hook the characters. Otherwise, simply drop this dead-end passage into your adventure where it seems to fit best.

The Commission: The PCs meet Derrin and learn of an item that his leader seeks: a journal written by one of the builders of a major drow gathering place (the gathering place is up to the DM to figure out). What the PCs don't find out right away (if at all) is that the journal was only one of the items lost when a certain warrior left his last widely known location with the *Sword of Selvetarm*. Derrin takes them to the area near the passage to the courtyard and says that the warrior was last seen in this area, according to his sources. Then he appears to leave. In actuality, he's lingering behind because he expects the PCs to wander into the courtyard and meet their first test.

The Aid: If the PCs are attempting to help Derrin find a way to rid himself of his current sad state of existence (without causing his death), you may want to hold out false hope and lead the whole group underground in search of an item that will restore him to his former self. (You could alternatively make it a truer hope by having it be an item that causes death [causing the cursed item to fall off] but immediately resurrects him as the spell *resurrection*.) In this case, this encounter occurs as they journey to some location Derrin believes holds the item, and you may wish to plant the item in the room beneath the courtyard.

The Courtyard of Spiders (EL 14)

After the PCs have been traveling underground, they come across a passage leading to a courtyard with an empty pool in it. Read the following text aloud (adjusting for other factors, such as Derrin):

The air is moist and dank, and the smell of mold permeates the area strongly. You hear the distant drip of water.

If the PCs enter the actual courtyard, read the following aloud before introducing the trap and creature:

You see before you a dark recess that once probably contained water. The floor in front of you is paved with dark marble, though much of it has chipped over the years, and it slopes gently toward the recess. Ornately engraved stones circle the recess, though they remain even with the rest of the floor. The walls are covered with cobwebs -- some beaded with moisture from the walls -- and an archway opposite you gapes open.



From a position just outside the threshold, those PCs who care to look (and can see) can determine that the recess was a very deep pool, for the sides visible to them don't seem to end. In fact, the pool (fountain, actually) was once 30 feet deep. Now a lot of its tiled bottom has crumbled away, and it opens up to a dark cavern below (as indicated by the purple shading and the word "Pit" on the map).

Traps: Just over the threshold in the room, the shadow spider that lurks within the recess has used its silk slick ability to cover a swath of the room leading to the former pool. (The swath is indicated by the pink shading and the word "Slick" on the map.) Those PCs who fall prey to the slick face a fall of over 60 feet (taking 6d6 falling damage) if they don't find a way to stop the descent. Once at the bottom, the shadow spider steps in.

Creatures: Below the lip of the recess lurks a shadow spider, plus two stone golems shaped like Large versions of elves.

Shadow Spider: hp 136; see *Monster Manual II*.

Stone Golems (2): hp 88; see *Monster Manual*.

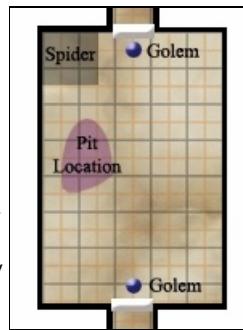
Tactics: Once someone falls into its cavern, the spider simply grabs the nearest fallen prey and takes the victim to its larder, as noted in the *Monster Manual II*. If nobody does fall, it doesn't attack but waits to see if the PCs are foolish enough to descend into the cavern on their own. If the spider finds itself on the verge of dying while facing the PCs, it simply retreats to its larder until it feels it is safe to leave.

The golems have stood at either side of this room for a long time. They each guard a door leading into and out of the room, but only against those who aren't dark elves. Those who attempt to pass (from either direction) and who aren't dark elves cause both golems to activate. Thus far, the shadow spider hasn't attempted to move past the golems, so it hasn't set them off.

Development: Should the PCs look in the mold-filled, dank cavern below the former fountain, they discover the following: the remains of an ornately carved fountain consisting of curiously lifelike spiders whose multiple eyes wink red in any light (PCs can find about 1,000 gp worth of rubies on the fountain), a jeweled scrollcase (900 gp value) that contains a slip of paper with words written in Undercommon, and a fang-shaped crystal (a *fang scarab* as described in *Song and Silence*). (The words on the scroll are up to the DM, but they could be useful in determining the next location for Naradna's agents to look for the sword she seeks--she didn't bother to look in the cavern below for anything.) The passages can lead to anywhere convenient to the DM. If the PCs investigate the room leading from the main courtyard, they discover a room whose egress has been caved in. Moldy tapestries are slumped on the floor on either side of the room. Very little remains of either tapestry; they dissolve into a clinging dust when touched.

Bringing the Parts Together

What will happen next? Perhaps the PCs did well enough in their encounter with the spider that Naradna seeks them out personally. Or perhaps she decides, based on their decisions, that the PCs are too dangerous to deal with and simply seeks to destroy them. Either way should provide the PCs with further challenges -- even if they never find the sword!



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